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ABSTRACT

In planning the safety program for elementary school children, teachers should be able to identify at least one safety objective to promote knowledge so as to aid in the development of basic safe attitudes and behaviors. The inclusion of safety instruction across all elementary levels and subjects constitutes the "multidisciplinary approach." Children are often the target of depraved acts of violence, due to their vulnerability. Considering the results of nationwide surveys, it is imperative that we provide safer schools and instructional methods that will teach children how to protect themselves both at school and at home. Finally, a critical problem today is the "latchkey" child. It is estimated that from two to seven million latchkey children are at home unattended each day. Safety instruction is not merely an accumulation of facts and statistics; it is the development of skills and attitudes that will promote the safety and well-being of elementary school students.
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ORGANIZING SAFETY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:
COMPONENTS OF THE PROCESS

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At

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ABSTRACT

ORGANIZING SAFETY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: COMPONENTS OF THE PROCESS

Every year, accidents claim the lives of thousands of children and many thousands more are injured. An urgent need exists for our schools to teach children the important components of safe behavior and conditions. While attempting to alleviate the more difficult unsafe behavior and conditions it is important to move gradually and purposefully toward the desired goals.

In planning the safety program for elementary children, teachers should be able to identify at least one safety objective to promote knowledge so as to aid in the development of basic safe attitudes and behaviors. The inclusion of safety across all elementary levels and subjects constitutes the "multidisciplinary approach." Safety instruction in the elementary schools cannot be left to chance; it is vital for their future.

Children are often the target of depraved acts of violence, due to their vulnerability. Based on nationwide surveys, it is imperative that we provide safer, more secure schools and instructional methods to teach children how to protect themselves both at school and at home.

Finally, a critical problem today is the "latchkey" child. It is estimated that two to seven million latchkey children are at home unattended each day. Safety instruction is not merely an accumulation of facts and statistics -- it is the development of skills and attitudes that will promote the safety and well-being of our elementary students.

SAFETY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: COMPONENTS OF THE PROCESS

by

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According to the National Safety Council, "accidents don't happen...they are caused." Further, there is seldom a single cause of an accident; rather, there is usually a combination or sequence of circumstances.

Through the efforts of OSHA, the Consumer Product Safety Administration, and other safety-oriented organizations, goals in the conservation of human and natural resources are being met. It is important for school personnel to learn how to eliminate unsafe conditions and to compensate for those which might be difficult to eradicate.

This commentary addresses the responsibilities of teachers, administrators, and others who have management roles in working with students. School administrators, teachers, and coaches have the responsibility of protecting students in school and during special activities, in addition to developing and promoting patterns of safe human behavior.

Safety education is the responsibility of all individuals who have leadership roles in our schools. Accidents remain the primary cause of death among school-aged children. According to the National Safety Council's publication *Accident Facts (1989)* more than 4,200 accidental deaths occurred last year among school children aged 5-14. There has been a reduction of traffic accidents among elementary school children. Most safety educators believe that the multidisciplinary approach to safety education should be provided starting in the elementary schools. Since many elementary classrooms are self-contained, they present opportunity to integrate and provide multidisciplinary instruction in safe living into all phases of the school program.

Aspects of the Multidisciplinary Approach to Safety

All elementary teachers should be able to identify at least one safety objective to promote knowledge so as to aid in the development of basic safe attitudes and behaviors. The inclusion of safety across all elementary levels and subjects constitutes the "multidisciplinary approach."

In organizing a safety program according to the multidisciplinary approach in the elementary schools the following variables are usually considered.

- . . What can be learned about safety?
- . . What is learned about safety?
- . . Why is this learned or not learned?

Planning the Safety Program

During the planning stage, people who have the responsibility for providing instruction in safe practices and a safe environment can contribute to the development of the total school safety program. This is the responsibility of all employees of the school district, and it must be a collaborative effort. Collaboration is not merely cooperation. Collaboration means to solicit respect and act upon the input from all levels within the school district. Active participation in the decision making process is the fundamental concept of collaboration. Preventing accidents is not a

simple matter, and this is the reason why safety must be a concern of everyone in the schools. The responsibility for the total school safety program may fall with management, (i.e., the school board and superintendent); however, each member of the district has his/her own safety responsibility in the collaborative process.

The school safety program should be based upon the activities of students, faculty, and staff. Program organization must take place before program implementations, or there will be no program to administer. The organizational phase must be followed by continuous administration in order to carry out the program objectives. In the past many excellent courses of study in safety education have been developed but were not incorporated into the curriculum of the schools for which they were intended.

According to Aaron and Strasser, (1981) "The basic purpose of the process of organization is planning; thus the organizational phase of the safety program is chiefly concerned with making arrangements that permit the realization of proposed objectives." Earlier, the school board and superintendent were mentioned as being top management because good administration should follow basic principles to assure that the objectives of any school safety program will be achieved. To carry out the administrative aspects of the school safety program, the superintendent should:

1. Employ teachers with safety training and conduct inservice safety training for all school personnel to meet the needs of their job functions.
2. Provide for cooperative, democratic participation by all school employees and students in the conduct of safety instruction and activities. Define authority and responsibilities of each person.
3. Provide a centralized structure for organization and administration of the program.
4. Establish a program of accident reporting to gather data on safety hazards and unsafe practices within the school's operation.
5. Provide a safe school environment.
6. Conduct a continuous program of evaluating safety instruction and activities within the school district. Revise the school safety program when necessary to meet changing needs as revealed by these data.

Instruction

After the safety needs of the district have been determined and the goals of the program have been established, a curriculum committee should be selected by the administrator to develop a functional safety education curriculum. A safety specialist should be a member of this committee. Over the years various types of curricula have been structured for safety education. Safety has been taught as a separate course, has been interrelated with other subjects, and has been taught in a combination of these patterns. Safety instruction is not merely an accumulation of facts and statistics--it is the development of skills and attitudes that will promote the safety and well-being of elementary students.

Elementary schools must follow basic safety rules that should be put into practice in the home. Children differ widely in their safety needs and readiness. A special problem today is the "latchkey" child. It is estimated that, after school hours, two to seven million latchkey children are

at home unattended. While the number of these children may be increasing, a proper response to this situation has not been made.

Many parents believe that self-help, safety, and precautionary skills ("survival" skills) are sufficient training for youngsters who must be left alone. However, parents must be made aware of the fact that there is a vast difference between the eleven- or twelve-year-old child who is occasionally left unsupervised and the five- or six-year old child that is regularly left at home. When the parent perceives the survival skills as a substitute for adult supervision, then they are legitimizing neglect.

In addition to teaching the child survival skills, we must instruct children in the proper way to respond to emergency situations at home. Important issues to address includes what if a stranger calls, whom to call when confronted with an emergency situation, and what to do in case of fire.

School Security

Children are often the target of depraved acts of violence, due to their vulnerability. Recent events involving schoolyard shootings, the taking of school children as hostages and other deviant acts against elementary age children reinforce the need for more secure facilities and more stringent security policies. It is imperative that we provide safer, more secure schools and instructional methods to teach children how to protect themselves both at school and at home. The fear of crime that many children exhibit is an obstacle that must be removed from the function as smoothly as possible even in areas of high crime and recent attacks upon schools.

Access Control

The security of children in the classroom is best accomplished through physical barrier reinforced by stringent policies governing public access to the elementary school. Doors and windows are effective barriers only when they are secured. Policies should be established and enforced to insure that persons cannot walk into our schools without being observed and cleared by administrative personnel. Legitimate visitors should be clearly identified; those who are not should be reported to the school principal immediately.

Facility Design

Elementary-age children are at the most risk when they are on school grounds that are exposed to the streets and the general public. The use of solid walls that provide a visual barrier as well as a shield is becoming more necessary, as the standard chain-link fence cannot provide adequate protection from some modern weapons being utilized by attackers. School design should offer a vantage point from which the playgrounds may be observed by faculty and staff in order to prevent abductions or, at the very least provide some degree of deterrence and the ability to detect an impending attack.

Vandalism and Theft

Vandalism and theft of school property disrupt the educational process and place a costly burden on the community. Security is a top priority for many school administrators, but they are too often faced with problems that they have little or no control over, such as school location, construction, and financial resources. School security should begin before the facility is constructed, as site selection, design, and material selection play major roles in the prevention of illegal intrusion, the abatement of vandalism, and its repair.

Local police forces should be consulted for tips on vandalism and theft control and for establishing routine patrols of the school grounds. Professional security services are another possibility to consider for nighttime patrols. Community programs can be established (e.g.,

Neighborhood Watch) to incorporate the security of the local school into existing watches or to utilize parent volunteers to patrol school grounds when the facility is closed.

Emergency Planning

Disasters of varying severity and magnitude strike schools almost daily. Disasters can affect entire communities or perhaps just one school, but regardless of the scope of impact, school officials are responsible for the safety of the children in their care. By planning for possible disasters, school officials can reduce the loss of property and better protect students. Planning will help to insure the immediate, coordinated response and recovery operations that are vital in coping with life-threatening emergencies.

Written emergency plans should be formulated, for each school in the system practiced, and evaluated to ensure that the entire school population is aware of the procedures. Several texts on the subject of emergency planning for schools provide excellent guidelines for structuring a school's response to disaster. The Federal Emergency Management Agency or local emergency service offices can also provide important resource information to assist in planning.

Accident Records

The safety supervisor must be concerned with hazards in the total school environment and with the safety of all school employees. The total responsibility of the safety practitioners is more complex than merely the instructional aspect. Information on unsafe conditions causing injuries and death is essential to the planning of an effective school safety program. An effective accident reporting system provides the basic data upon which the total program of school safety must be built. If the program is to meet the needs, the school must secure all available information on the type and frequency of student accidents. To do this, procedures must be established for reporting accidents. The National Safety Council's Accident Report defines both reportable and recordable accidents and is an excellent resource for schools.

The accident records and reports should be utilized to reduce or eliminate hazardous conditions in the school and also to provide a base for the development of relevant safety instruction. If reports are only completed and filed without further reference they will serve no useful purpose.

The actual report form should be as brief as possible, but provide the necessary information for the purposes of:

- . . Evaluating the safety program
- . . Eliminating hazards
- . . Determining future instructional needs

Evaluation

Evaluation should be a continuous process. Whenever the behavior of people is considered, evaluation procedures must take into account the numerous chance factors and the differences among people. Only through effective evaluative procedures can the school safety program be improved or modified. A proper analysis examines the past and delineates the changes needed for the future. Program measurement and objective evaluations are critical, especially in those areas where accident statistics are most alarming.

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